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ABSTRACT

The present research on self-evaluation embraced 360 students, 11-15 years of age, in grades 5 to 8. Subjects selected from an ordered set of tasks (easiest to most difficult) those conforming with their self-evaluated possibilities and attempted to solve them. The easier problems were typical of academic tasks, Polish language and mathematics, while the more difficult problems pertained to extraschool activities of which the subjects had no previous experience. This procedure permitted observation of (1) behavior in success and failure situations and (2) the order of problems selected according to degree of difficulty. Self-evaluation categories and the frequency of their appearance among pupils according to age were established. The following categories were disclosed: stable adequate, stable enhanced, stable lowered, and unstable. Most pupils in all grades exhibited adequate self-evaluation. Next in number were unstable. The number of children with adequate self-evaluation increases, and the frequency of unstable and inadequate self-evaluation declines, with age. The article provides information on the personality traits of individuals with different kinds of self-evaluation, differentiation depending on forms of activity and its relation with success at school. Cases of children representing various types of self-evaluation are described. (Author/JBJ)

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SELF-EVALUATION AND SUCCESS AT SCHOOL

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Abstract:

The present research on self-evaluation embraced 360 students /11-15 years of age/ in grades V-VIII. In the technique applied, the subiects had to selected from an ordered set of tasks/from easiest to most difficult/ those conforming with their self-evaluated possibilities and to solve them. Part of the problems were typical of academic tasks /polish language and mathematics/, others pertained to extraschool activity of which the subjects had no previous experience. This procedure permitted observation of behavior in success and failure situations and to register the order of selected problems /according to degree of difficulty/.Data analysis was the basis of conclusions on the kinds of self-evaluation.

Self-evaluation categories and the freguency of their appearance among pupils according to age were established. The following categories were disclosed: stable adequate, stable enhanced, stable lowered, and unstable. Most pupils in all grades exhibited adequate self-evaluation. Next in number were the unstable.The number of children with adequate self-evaluation increases and the frequency of unstable and inadequate self-evaluation declines with age.

The article provides information on the personality traits of individuals with different kinds of self-evaluation, differentiation depending on forms of activity and its relation with success at school. Cases are described of children representing various types of self-evaluation.

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Introduction

By self-evaluation is understood the complex of an individual´s opinions and judgements about himself, in particular of his looks, abilities, achievements and possibilities. It is a component of personality. Without self-evaluation it would be impossible either to define one´s own individuality or to distinguish oneself from others. It furthermore enables to view oneself critically and to constantly assess one´s possibilities in face of varying demands of life. Self-evaluation may be total or partial. The measure of the degree of total self-evaluation is not the mean of the partial assessments but the level of evaluation of those traits which the individual considers dominant and with which he identifies.

Podgórecki /1968/ attributes to total self-evaluation a certain stability/durability/, immutable over a given period of life, firmly rooted and inseverable from what is self to be the authentic and unique "I". This "I" may be manifested in overrating or underrating one´s possibilities in relation to awaited tasks. Self-evaluation is enhanced in the first case and lowered in the second. This is so because experience acquired over the years is not uniform for different individuals. Dominant with some is the experience of public recognition and consequent satisfaction /reward/, with others it is mostly failures and setbacks. It may hence be considered that success and accompanying public recognition contribute to high self-evaluation, while long-lasting failure causes low opinion of oneself and correspondingly low-self-evaluation. Soccesses alternating with failures/Or vice versa/ may contribute to shaping a vacillating, unstable self-evaluation as an expression of unstable personality. It may be assumed that only a certain percentage of persons form their self-evaluation proportionaly to their experience. When it is sometimes high, sometimes

low, depending on merits, we speak of an adequate self-evaluation.

The aim of the present paper is to establish:

1. the kinds of self-evaluation prevalent among adolescents,
2. the personality traits of individuals with various kinds of self-evaluation,
3. whether the subjects rate their possibilities uniformly in spheres of activity where they had previous experience and in fields where they had none,
4. the relation, if any, between progress in studies and particular kinds of self-evaluation.

Data on the above were obtained by the Hoppe Experiment technique.

Method

The subjects were given 9 numberd cards containing on the reverse side a number of problems of progressing dificulty:

a/ easy problems numbered 1, 2, 3; b/ problems of average dificulty: 4, 5, 6,

c/difficult problems numbered: 7,8,9,

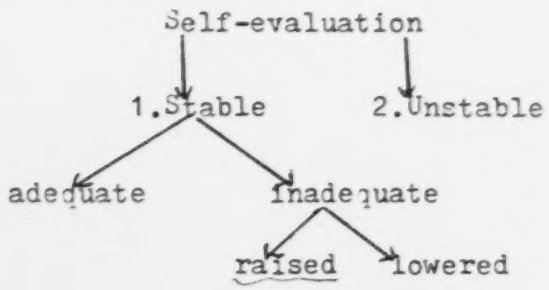
Each subject was asked to pick 1 problem according to his/her imagined possibilities and to solve it. After the first successful or unsuccessful attempt the task was repeated three more times. The aim was to observe the subject's behavior in success and failure and to obtain information on the sequence of problems chosen.

Type of self-evaluation was established by analyzing the choices. Pupils consistently selecting problems from the easy group and solving them without much difficulty while avoiding the averagely difficult ones were defined as having lowered self-evaluation. High stability and exclusive choice of difficult, unsoluble problems characterized the opposite extreme: those of enhanced self-evaluation. Pupils who chose and solved problems according to their actual possibilities were diagnosed with adequate self-evaluation. This type may be high, average or low. Subjects ignorant of their actual possibilities, who jumped in their choices from the easiest to the most difficult problems represented unstable self-evaluation.

For sake of reliability, the experiment was conducted in two series. In the first, problems were used from filds known to the subjects: Polish language and mathematics contained in the school curriculum. In the second, problems were chosen from the squares test. The objective of this strategy was to determine whether the subjects assess their possibilities uniformly in fields where they have experience and where they have none. The investigation embraced 360 pupils from grades V-VIII /in the Polish school system this corresponds to the age range of 11-15 years/.

Results:

The following types of self-evaluation were distinguished on the basis of the data obtained:



We shall analyze the above types of self-evaluation with particular emphasis on the stable and unstable. This is an essential question, since, as L.Bozovitz /1985/ maintains:"Stable self-evaluation attests to a stable personality and unstable to an irresolute, vacillating personality". Type of self-evaluation is also closely linked with the degree of personality structuring and organization. Thus individuals with stable self-evaluation have better ordered and structured personalities than their opposites. A poorly structured personality, in the opinion of J.Reykowski /1970/, is more susceptible to emotional influences. Such personalities, according to the author, characterize individuals whose self-concepts are inadequate or shaped by conflicting experience.

Adequate self -evaluation

The data show that almost /46,6%/ of the investigated pupils have adequate self-evaluation and the rest /53,4%/ in adequate or unstable. Considering that the former rate themselves more or less uniformly in the different fields of activity, regardless of experience, it may be concluded that adequate self-evaluation is characteristic of a given period of development of personality traits. Following is an example of a person with adequate self-evaluation.

Jolanta S.,an average pupil, chose the difficult problems 6,7,8,9 in the first series of the experiment /mathematics/ . She solved the first three in 20 minutes with a little help from the experimenter. During the test she was completely at ease. When asked how she rated her mathematical ability, Jolanta considered herself a good student,although she had only passing marks in the previous two years. The experiment verified the correctness of her estimation, as illustrated by the diagram below /figures 1 and 2/.

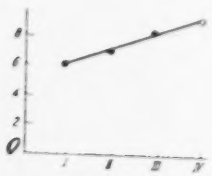


Fig. 1. Mathematics

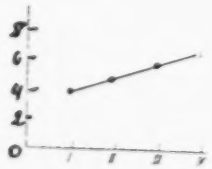


Fig. 2. Polish language

* The diagrams are graphic pictures of the experiment's successive stages. Numbers of problems in the order of their difficulty are depicted on the vertical axes, and the successive choices—on the horizontal axes. Black circles signify problems solved, white ones—unsolved.

Jolanta was more cautious with the Polish language problems. Her first choice was from the average difficulty group /n0.4/ since she was aware of being somewhat weaker in this subject. After successfully solving that problem her further choices consistently increased in difficulty. Except for the last problem she met no unsurmountable difficulties. She proceeded identically in the squares test.

Analysis of the test results and the girls' behavior during the experiment indicate a self-evaluation always consonant with her actual possibilities, despite some differences in the evaluation level in relation to particular subjects. Jolanta S. systematic in her studies, has many

friends and is liked by her classmates. She devotes much time to social work at school and her outside environment. All of this confirms with the thesis of J.Brownfain/1962/ that an adequate self-evaluation is most desirable because of the possibility of the individual adjusting to the environment. Similar conclusions were reached by C.Rogers /1954/ who asserted that individuals with adequate self-evaluation are most frequently well adjusted.

Inadequate self-evaluation

As indicated above, stable self-evaluation may be adequate or inadequate. It is inadequate when individuals insist on setting themselves tasks they cannot cope with or which they fulfil considerably below their possibilities. According to some authors, e.g. Lewin/1935/, J.Reykowski /1970/, self-evaluation is strongly linked with level of aspiration.Enhanced self-evaluation is associatet with an aspiration level above/overestimation/ and lovered self-evaluation with an aspiration level below /understimation/ one's actual possibilities.

Enhanced self-evaluation

The considerable majority of pupils in the inadequate self-evaluation group displayed a tendency to overestimate their possibilities.This phenomenon was observed both in fields where the subjects had previous experience /Polish language and mathematics/ and where they had none /the squares test/. Of the investigated pupil sample of 19,9% overestimated their possibilities: 21,2% in fields with previous experience, 17,2% in the squares test.These percentages varied over grades. We thus ascertained a mean of 23,7% in grade V and 16,2% in grade VIII who overestimated their possibilities. These data indicate the older the pupils, the lower the percentage in this respect.The differences, not sudden leaps but gradual and systematic, were most distinct between grades V and VIII.

Topical representatives of pupils with raised self-evaluation started

with problems 6 and 7 and despite failure made each successive choice from the group of difficult problems.Christopher, a fifth grade pupil of intelligentsia origin, may serve as example.Impolite during the experiment instructions, as soon as he learnt its nature and without stopping to consider, chose problem 7. After reading it three times Christopher declared after several written attempts to calculate the results: "This problem is queer and cannot be solved". Despite failure, his next choice was problem NO.8, still harder, and finally- the most difficult, problem No.9.

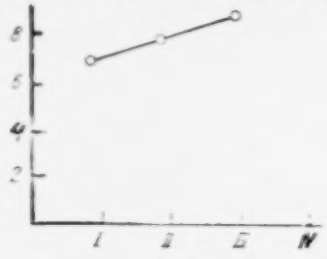


Fig. 3. Mathematics

As shown in Fig.3,all three attempts in the above example ended in failure.Christopher motivated his complete confidence by assuring that he could solve difficult mathematical problems "but these are so queer" Seeing that the boy could not manage the problems selected, the experiment proposed that he choose from the averagely difficult ones. The suggestion was not considered. After 30 minuts of vian attempts Christopher turned in his cards and as he was leaving the hall remonstrated loudly: "I solved other problems like this and got A's!"

It should finnaly be noted that pupils with enhanced self-evaluation choose problems mainly within one group. Weak ones, with poor school records, test their ability by tackling problems of average difficulty; those with passing marks aspire to solve more difficul tones. These pupils' choice of problems is independent of succes or failure during the experiment. This means that behavior in this category is due to fixed opinions of themselves and does not depend on momentary success or failure. They retain their convition although their self-evaluation does not correspond with their possibilities and are inclined to undertake tasks above their powers, thus manifesting inadequate self-evaluation in concrete fields of activity.To suplement the characteristic

of this group of pupils, we may add that they behave similarly in the squares test where they cannot anticipate their possibilities. This is additional evidence that an inflated aspiration level is a personality tr a it. It may be assumed that such traits are tipical of the dogmatic personality.

According to the protocol of the experiment, 95% of the subjects with enhanced self-evaluation replied "well", "I" have no difficulties", "I solve all problems myself" to the question: "How are you managing with mathematics and Polish language?"They explained their choice of more difficult problems after failures as follows:"I hoped I would manage even the more difficuld, ones", I am able to solve difficult problems, but tuday it somehow didn't go", etc. In short, these answer of subjects with enhanced self-evaluation confirm their conviction that the cause of failure is not latent in themselves but lies in objective circumstances or in other persons. Characteristic of this group is their reference to the past in cases of failure, to good or very good marks in the subject in earlier grades, while ignoring current marks./For more detailed data c.f., Niebrzydowski, 1976, 1989/. Pupils with enhanced self-evaluation often ignore assesments that do not correspond with their aspirations and do not verify previous attitudes fixed during their school careers. For low marks currently obtained they most often blame teachers, sometimes parents or colleagues, whom they accuse of injustice. Failure does not lead them to analyze their behavior but only deepens erroneous self-knowledge and self-evaluation.

Lowered self-evaluation

"A lowered self-evaluation is a state in which a person attributes to himself lower possibilities than actually possessed and hence understimates or social attractivness. He has a lower opinion of the moral values of his activities than they deserve and he expects less from other people than is justified". /Reykowski,1970,p.50/. As a rule,such

a person does not believe in his possibilities and is reluctant to undertake difficult tasks out of fear of failure. It is hence a psychic state which hampers activity and creative initiative. Persons with lowered self-evaluation sometimes resign from more attractive types of schools, work or public functions, since they lack confidence in their ability to cope with them. They are furthermore in a constant state of internal tension and are often worried and disturbed. This state may evoke behavior unexpected by the environment. A negatively self-evaluating individual or one with an inferiority complex may manifest defensive attitudes and deeds expressed in aggression, disorganization or escape from reality/Tomaszewski, 1975/.

The present research disclosed very few pupils with lowered self-evaluation both in fields of activity with and without previous experience. They constitute 4,5% of subjects in all the investigated grades, which is negligent when compared with the number with the other types of self-evaluation.

The great majority of the lowered self-evaluation group do poorly at school and usually have workers' background. More rarely, they consist of average pupils who fail in one or two subjects. It should also be noted that girls underestimate their possibilities more often than boys. The experimental data further indicate that while the percentage of this category is slight, it tends to grow from year to year. This is closely associated with the rise in self-criticizm. It is also to be observed that pupils overestimating and underestimating their possibilities both display certain characteristic peculiarities, e.g. they choose problems within one group. Those with lowered self-evaluation choose them very cautiously, below their possibilities. Waldek grade VII, blue-collar background, rated average by his teachers, may serve as an example of this kind of self-evaluation. He made the following choices in the experimental series /see Figures 4, 5, 6.

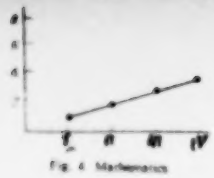


Fig. 4. Mathematics

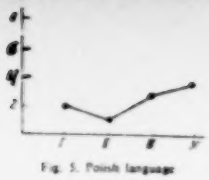


Fig. 5. Polish language

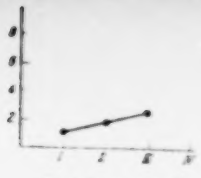


Fig. 6. Squares test

Although he solved those problems without difficulty, Waldek could not be persuaded to choose more difficult ones because he considered himself a pupil. According to the teachers, he was average in the lower grades and had difficulties only in mathematics. Waldek said about himself: " I am a weakling". His grade VII teacher stated that his written answers were much better than the verbal ones and he admitted that he "loses his head" at the blackboard.

It turned out that 65% of pupils with lowered self-evaluation were school failures. The remaining 35% were those of a low or average achievement level. There were no gifted pupils in that group.

Observation during the experiment pointed to hyper-sensitivity to assessment or criticizm and constant fear of failure or ridicule as the causes of lowered self-evaluation. Such pupils are especially affected by failure and their capability of further effort is consequently reduced /c.f. Niebrzydowski,1989/.

Unstable self-evaluation

Unstable self-evaluation is impaired. It may take two forms: 1/not yet crystallized, and 2/ undergoing change under the impact of current experience.Both forms reveal great vacillation in determining one's level of aspiration. Thus, the individual is at times convinced he can attain much and outdo competitors in many respects and at other times he manifests quite the contrary, i.e.,he believes he is worthless and cannot cope with the slightest difficulty /Reykowski, 1970/,According to L.Bozowitz, this is a typical symptom of immature self-perception, ofen designated as disintegration, which is manifested in two successive contradictory conceptions of one's possibilities /Bozovitz,1955/.

This is particulary evident in childchood and adolescence, revealing lack of equilibrium in the psychic processes and an emotional approach to the surrounding world. In such persons small successes may cause heightened aspirations and a better frame of mind, while even a slight failure may seem a serius problem and tragedy. A fairly large percentage of the investigated pupils manifested an unstable /vacillating/ assessment of their possibilities. The mean for the four investigated grades oscillates between 23,6% in Polish language and 35,5% in the squares test. Most unstable assessments thus appear in the latter, a field where the subjects had no previous experience.

There are no statistically significant differences between grades, although the percentage of pupils with unstable self-evaluation declines progressively over grades. The mean for the three tasks covered by the experiment amounts to 32,2% in grade V. Fewest unstable self-evaluation were noted in grade VIII /mean for 3 tasks = 24%/ and most in grade V. The higher proportion in this grade can be attributed to many factors, the most important of which are:

1/ Changed demands in connection with the switch from introductory teaching /grades I-IV/, to elementary systematics /grade V/;

2/Greater demands posed on pupils in higher elementary school grades. New conditions need not always be unfavorable for the pupil, but it often happens that when promoted from grade IV to V, a previously successful pupil becomes average and a passing student-unsatisfactory;

3/Increased activity of the internal secretion glands and accompanying shaky equilibrium of the psychic processes. It may be difficult for some pupils to maintain a stable self-evaluation in these conditions. Beginning with grade, VI pupils enter a certain period of stabilization accustom themselves to the new requirements and commence to reconcile to the positions of good, average or weak pupil. Most stable in this recpect are grade VIII pupils. Only 17,7% and 22,2% respectively did not have a mature opinion of their possibilities in Polish language and mathematics. The rest had stable self-evaluation.

The situation with the squares test was somewhat different. Here the percentage with unstable self-evaluation was pretty large, even in grade VIII, amounting to 32,2%. Moreover, every third pupil of this class was unable to assess his possibilities adequately in a field where he lacked experience, It is noteworthy that more weak than good pupils have unstable self-evaluation. Those successful in their studies evaluated themselves very stably in all series of the experiment.

For a more accurate elucidation of the silhoutte of an unstably self-evaluating pupil we shall analyze the case of Bożena, a Puck school pupil of average attainment level. She started the mathematics test with the easiest problem /No.1/ which she solved easily. Very happy with her success and sure of herself, her second choice was the very difficult problem 8. As was to be expected, she could not manage it. She got flustered, blushed and said: "It may be better if I don't try to solve any more problems". It required a long conversation to convince the girl to continue. Learning from her unpleasant experience, she now asked for an easier problem- No.2. Meeting with no difficulty, Bożena livened up and again felt satisfied with herself. In the fourth attempt she asked for problem No.5, of average difficulty. This time she failed again. Her successive choices are illustrated in Fig. 7:

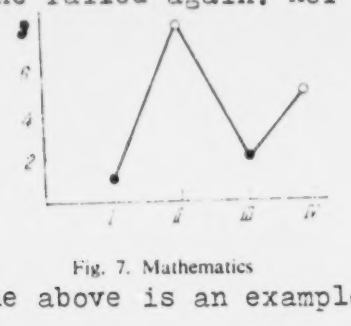


Fig. 7. Mathematics

The experiment, consisting—as above—of two series of tasks: 1) a which the pupils had previous e (Polish language and mathemat 2) activity in a field where they h (the squares test), disclosed four self-evaluation. These are: stable a stable enhanced, stable lowered, stable.

The above is an example of sudden jumps from easiest to most difficult problems. This attests to a weak awareness of possibilities and great vacillation of mood. Small sucesses evoke self-confidence and self-assurance and even petty failures cause discouragement and breakdown. As a rule, representatives of this group alternate between happy and lively moods and states of depression and breakdown. Changes of mood and exhilaration from successful activity reveal an ambivalent attitude toward oneself expressed in a low assessment of the attributes of

one´s "I" on the one hand and to compesatory accenting of other traits of the"I" on the other. It may be asserted that an individual of unstable self-evaluation is strongly affected by arising situation.If a situation is favorable and that individual scores a success, then the self-evaluation is raised: if unaforable-it is sharply lowered.It follows then that the "I" /personality/ of such a person is completely dependent on the moods evoked by success or failure.

It may be accepted that unstable self-evaluation results from a collision between current and previous self-concepts. When conditions are unfavorable for maintaining a prevailing self-concept it gives way to a new one. This process proceeds at a different rate with different persons. When self- concept and the associated self-evalouation change in a positive direction, the shif is conflictless: if in a negative direction -it may be manifested in disturbed behavior. When a negative change proceeds too rapidly, behavior is artificial,betraying symptoms of maladjustment /Niebrzydowski, 1989/.

Conclusions

The experiment, consisting-as shown above-of two series of tasks:
1/.activity in which the pupils had previous experience /Polish language and mathematics/ and 2/Activity in a field where they had none /the squares test/, disclosed four kinds of self-evaluation. These are: stable adequate, stable enhanced, stable lowered, and unstable.

All types were present both in grade V and grade VIII pupils.The majority of pupils in all investigated grades had adequate self-evaluation /mean for both types of activity= 46,6%/. These data suggest that in this case adequate self-evaluation is a personality trait. Next in number were those with unstable self-evaluation who constituted a mean of 29% in all grades, regardless of the type of activity tested.But the percentage of the latter category differd with age and type of activity Most were found in grade V and the least in grade VIII.A comparison of pupils with different types of self-evaluation revealed an increase in

proportion of the atequate type and a decline of the inadequate and unstable types with age. This regularity pertains to evaluation both in and out of school. A comparison of the data of both experimental series shows that among the majority of subjects self-evaluation either corresponds in both activities or show a rising tendency in school activity. In extramural activity there is a rise only in unstable self-evaluation. Only 4,5% of the pupils were ascertained to have understimated their possibilities in both kinds of activity /see also Niebrzydowski, 1989/

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